

Precision control

BY JOE SAGE

GLS is the flagship of the Mercedes-Benz SUV lineup (at least its gasoline models), descending from the longstanding GL when its first two letters were applied to all the SUV models. The 2024 Mercedes-Benz GLS 580 4MATIC we are driving here is, in turn, the upper trim of two mainstream luxury Mercedes-Benz versions. (There are also top-top-performance Mercedes-AMG and top-top-luxury Mercedes-Maybach iterations—see sidebar chart—though ours does pick up a number of features from each.)

The GLS 580 is a powerful beast, with a 510-horsepower 4.0-liter biturbo V8 mild hybrid system with 538 lb-ft of torque (or up to 531 hp and 722 lb-ft with Boost) and 4MATIC all-wheel-drive, good for zero-to-60 in just 4.7 seconds. How's that for a

big three-row SUV that can tow 7,700 pounds and also has an off-road mode?

The off-road mode may seem a bit of a surprise in a vehicle with 22-inch wheels standard (or 23-inch on our sample), with an urban executive flair. Then again, this vehicle is big enough to have what appear to be healthy sidewalls on those big wheels, so although no-one is likely to take this rock-crawling, it seems to be capable of escaping the office for a good dirt road tow of your boat or horses to your favorite remote lake or trail (we did not take this sample off road at all). Ground clearance is not stated, but it does have AIRMATIC air suspension and should have impressive numbers at any setting. Our sample also had high-performance summer tires, as do the standard wheels,

something you would likely want to revisit for dirt.

To its highly equipped \$112,000 base, ours adds \$16,000 or so in options and packages, as most will—on ours, those wheels, Nappa leather, a Premium Plus package, Burmester 3D audio, handsome MANUFAKTUR Alpine Grey paint and more.

As always, we started by adjusting the seats and mirrors, and best of all, the GLS has discrete metal buttons, as opposed to the plasticky continuous membrane that interconnects them on some other models, which can trigger the wrong function. (We've seen both for awhile, so don't know if it indicates they've figured this out. Or maybe it's evolving the other way. Time will tell.)

While thinking about the seats, we went for the massage feature. Whether for bliss, therapy or both, Mercedes has some of the best massaging seats in the business, with a wide range of regions and motions, but you do have to navigate into the

screen to set them. But unlike some, they do run indefinitely, plus we soon realized that when you return to the vehicle and restart, they briefly come up on the screen, ready for another go, so you learn to seize the moment and fire 'em up again.

With its size, height and almost-three-ton heft, the GLS felt a little ponderous at first. But as we have been increasingly using drive modes, we switched to sport—which surely benefits from the range and adaptability of its air suspension—and from there forward, it always felt neat and trim, with firmer steering and its high center of gravity largely erased. As with most, you do have to switch to your preferred mode every time, but by about your first turn, you'll remember to reach down to its well-placed and easy control and kick it back into sport. As clean, modern and fully-featured as the instruments are in the GLS, we came to enjoy that—sort of like a pilot doing routine pre-flight.

(A side note: having said that, we researched a bit, and if there's a pattern at all, it seems some hybrids do allow you to stay in eco mode.)

It seems a given that sport mode, along with a 510-hp V8 and sophisticated suspension, will power you smoothly through freeway flyovers and such. While wondering what this actually does to fuel mileage (rated 20 mpg combined, not bad for such a hefty machine), we perceived that in many conditions, the engine wasn't working as hard in sport mode—child's play, like asking a weight-lifter to take out the trash—and may just as likely be preserving fuel economy in its own way.

The weather turned nasty during our week, but we had our heated massaging seats, and we continued to fall for sport mode. Even in stop-pause-go traffic, we had such tight control, we could do whatever we wanted or needed. The powertrain of the GLS was serving our whims and needs, not the other way around.

If you have the price of entry, this big SUV is hard to beat. And don't forget—though we haven't driven them back-to-back lately, in addition to the AMG and Maybach versions, there's also the 375-horsepower GLS 450 4MATIC for \$25 grand less. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Vance, Alabama
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION	Germany/Germany
CONTENT	US/Canada 10% / Germany 25%
PASSENGERS	six (captain's chairs, opt)
ENGINE	4.0L V8 biturbo mild hybrid
	diecast alloy block/heads
HP/TORQUE	510 hp / 538 lb-ft
ADDTL OUTPUT (BOOST)	+21 hp / +184 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
TRANSMISSION	9G-TRONIC 9-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	4MATIC® AWD
0-TO 60 MPH / TOP SPEED	4.7 sec / 130 mph
SUSPENSION	4-wheel indep
	w self-leveling AIRMATIC® and
	Adaptive Damping System (ADS Plus);
	F: dbl-wishbone; R: multilink
STEERING	rack and pinion, electro-mech
	power assist
BRAKES	(no info or specs)
WHEELS	(opt) 23-in AMG twin 5-spoke,
	black (staggered; no dimensions avail)
	(std: 22-in AMG; F: 9.5x22; R: 11.5x22)
TIRES	(opt) F: 285/40 R23; R: 325/35 R22
	summer high-performance
	(std: F: 285/45 R22; R: 325/40 R22
	summer high-performance)
GROUND CLEARANCE	(not stated)
TURNING CIRCLE	41.0 ft
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	205.2 / 123.4 in
HEADROOM (F/2/3)	39.4 / 40.2 / tba in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	40.3 / 41.9 / 34.6 in
CARGO CAPACITY	17.4 - 84.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	5820 lb
TOW CAPACITY	7716 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem unl / 23.8 gal
MPG	14/20/16 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$112,000
PAINT: MANUFAKTUR Alpine Grey	1750
LEATHER: black exclusive Nappa leather	1370
WOOD TRIM: natural grain grey oak	160
WOOD/LEATHER STEERING WHEEL	600
EXCLUSIVE WOOD TRIM PKG	450
NIGHT PKG	400
ACOUSTIC COMFORT PKG	90
PREMIUM PLUS PKG	1800
WHEELS: 23-in AMG twin 5-spoke, black	1900
MB-TEX DOOR TRIM	350
REAR SIDE AIRBAGS	700
TRAILER HITCH	600
GLASS: heat, noise insul, infrared reflect	1010
AUDIO: Burmester high-end 3D surround	
sound system	4550
DESTINATION CHARGE	1150
TOTAL	\$128,880

2024 MERCEDES GLS LINEUP

.....hp+boost ... 0-to-60	
GLS 450 4MATIC	375+20 ... 5.8 ... \$ 87,000
GLS 580 4MATIC	510+21 ... 4.7 ... 112,000
AMG GLS 63	603+21 ... 4.1 ... 145,850
Maybach GLS 600	550+21 ... 4.7 ... 174,350